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News Leakers Deserve Jail, Shultz Says

Secretary of State George P. Shultz, charging that government officials have become too casual about leaks to the news media, said yesterday that people who reveal "highly classified, sensitive information should be tossed in jail."

"I'm not persuaded that lie detector tests are the thing to do by a long shot," Shultz told editors and staff members of The Washington Post. "So it's very difficult to find out who's leaking what But if they do, they ought to be put in jail."

Shultz praised "an aggressive, high-powered press" for "by and large doing a good job of keeping track of things." But he asserted that leaks of sensitive information sometimes make it difficult for the government to execute its policies successfully, and he complained that much of the media lack "a reflective quality."

He cited his speech Tuesday calling on the United States and other democratic governments to start thinking seriously of how to counter terrorism. His aim, he said, was to discuss "issues for the country, not partisan, not really tied to any particular event, but things we should think over, and it's been rather disappointing to me that, on the whole, the press has looked at it and said, 'Well, where's the news peg?'"

Shultz said some of the problem is due to decreased competition in the news business. "It used to be the case that in any major city you had several newspapers, and typically newspapers had a point of view . . . and there was in a sense competition."

Now, he added, most cities have only one or two newspapers and the three major television networks, which are "all pretty much the same" in their news coverage. He expressed belief that a change could be made in television news if the government, instead of keeping TV channels subject to periodic license renewal, sold them and allowed the buyers to use them as they saw fit, including selling them without restriction.

That, he argued, would allow much more room for experimenting with different formats of news presentations. The advent of cable television, he noted, has meant a start in that direction "and the monopoly of the networks, I think, is going to get broken down, and there'll be competition in television and that will be very healthy"

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